A VOYAGE TO

AFRICA

WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THE MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF THE DAHOMIAN PEOPLE

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MDCCCXX

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The following little Narrative having been read in manuscript by several of the writer's friends, in whose judgment he has much reason to confide, they recommended its publication, principally on the ground that every light respecting Africa was desirable, with the view of promoting the civilization and improvement of its population. They likewise proposed its appearance precisely in the state it now stands, conceiving that a short and simple relation of facts, as they occurred, (more especially in the description of savages) frequently enables the mind to form a better judgment of their character,

than a more elaborate and voluminous production.

Should the perusal of these pages tend to suggest to others any more feasible plan for the amelioration of the benighted Africans, the author will be fully compensated for the awkwardness which he feels in thus obtruding on the world, what might otherwise be considered a mere history of personal adventures.

VOYAGE TO AFRICA.

In the beginning of the year 1803, the reduction of the naval establishment, in consequence of the short peace, or rather armistice, cast loose, among other classes of officers, a great number in the medical department.

Many of the junior branches, who had entered the service immediately from college, and had been, of course, cut off from the opportunity of forming those connexions, so necessary to success in private practice, and at that early period of life also, when success could not fairly

be expected, were now obliged to seek for employment in other directions.

Indeed, the department under which they were more immediately placed (that of Earl St. Vincent), was desirous rather of their continuing afloat and unsettled, as by these means they would acquire an accession to that sort of experience, which improved them for the service, should it be again necessary to call upon them; and, as an additional spur, or encouragement to exert themselves in obtaining such situations, all half-pay or other provision was at that time judiciously withheld from them.

I was one of those thus happily circumstanced; and therefore accepted an appointment as Surgeon of a Ship, bound from London to the Coast of Africa, in the Slave Trade. For this purpose, how-

ever, it was necessary for me, being attached to the King's service, to obtain regular leave of absence from the country for a certain term; for which document a fee of office was required. On demurring with the Secretary (a smiling round-faced little gentleman,) about the reasonableness of this demand from one who received nothing whatever from the public, and was himself retained by no fee, he replied, that the case certainly seemed rather a hard one; but it was the *form* of office: and, as it was an honour to be attached to the list even without half-pay, which in due time might also lead to higher and more substantial advancement, so it would be a pity on account of any little *informality*, to run a risk or lose the chance of these prospective advantages.

Flattered (to a certain extent) by the dignified view which he took of the subject, and cheered with the hope of better days, I paid the money, and merrily embarked on board the *Trusty*, then lying in the River.

In January she sailed from the Mother Bank, soon cleared the Channel with a favouring gale, and steered the usual course for the African shores.

We coasted along from Cape Spartel to Cape Mount, passing Senegal (having kept inside the Canary Islands and those of Cape de Verd), without any occurrence worthy of notice, except that one day, when at no great distance from the latter islands, we observed the sea around us, change suddenly to a florid red colour; but, in about a quarter of an hour, we

passed over this space, and came again as suddenly into what is usually termed blue-water, the natural hue of the ocean when out of soundings.

We drew up several buckets during the time this redness lasted; but there was no difference in colour between it and sea-water generally.

This phenomenon, therefore, must have been occasioned by the reflection of some red substance from the bottom, probably a coral bank.

We touched at several places between Cape Mount and Cape Coast Castle; such as Garraway, Cape Palmas, St. Andrews, Cape Lahoo, Grand Bassam, and Apollonia, in order to obtain the necessary proportion of rice and corn for the future supply of the slaves in the mid-

dle passage, or voyage to the West Indies; this being what is termed the grain coast.

In this run we noticed various races of people and languages; but our intercourse was too short to admit of particular observation of their manners.

In this whole line, however, there appeared to be no nation of any importance, being all scattered and petty tribes, tributary to some more powerful neighbour of the interior, such as Ashantee.

Skill in swimming and diving seemed to be a very characteristic feature among them. In this respect they were literally amphibious, and their dexterity in following downwards and picking up any trifling metallic substance thrown overboard to excite them, was really astonishing.

After remaining a day or two at Cape Coast Castle (the capital of our African settlements,) we proceeded to leeward into the Gulf of Benin, taking with us canoes and canoemen. In this Gulf the sea-wind blows constantly from the west-south-westward, and on that account there rolls in from the Ocean on all parts of the coast, a tremendous surf in which no European boat, can live; and therefore it becomes necessary before passing the Gold Coast, to hire these Fantee canoemen (generally a captain and thirty-two men to each canoe) in order to communicate with the shore, as they are not only more expert in crossing the bar than any other people, but as some of the nations of this neighbourhood have a religious prejudice against wetting

their feet with salt water, it would be impossible to communicate without their assistance.

Passing this surf for the first time is a very terrific process. Watching a favourable opportunity, the canoemen commence operations on the back of a high curling breaker, and paddling with all their might, singing or rather shouting their wild song, they follow it up, endeavouring to avoid that billow which is coming on astern; and in this way they generally contrive to get thrown high upon the beach, when all instantly jump out, and take care that the canoe is not washed back again by the succeeding wave.

Should the canoe be upset, which not unfrequently happens, the first grand object with the blacks is to save any

white men who may be in it; for if the latter are drowned through neglect or inattention, the canoemen, being themselves like ducks upon the water, are answerable for such misconduct with their heads.

We arrived in Whydah road in the beginning of March, and Captain Davidson, a very worthy man with whom I had been on most friendly terms during our passage out, having had a previous knowledge of that place, which is considered the Circassia of Africa, (not from the fairness, but from the glossy blackness of the ladies' skins, and the docility of their dispositions,) resolved to establish a factory there for the purpose of purchasing them, whilst he himself should proceed to Lagos about an hundred and

twenty miles farther down the Gulf, in order to complete the proportion of men.

He now proposed that I should undertake the charge of this establishment and leave the medical duties of the ship (with which he had considerable acquaintance) to him, and to this I readily assented. Having arranged matters with Governor Abson of Fort William with whom I was to live, and who kindly agreed to superintend my utter inexperience in these affairs, I landed, and was introduced to the native public authorities as captain of the *Shrimp*, a small cutter employed as a tender to our large ship, which, to keep up appearances, hovered only in the offing, or anchored at a great distance from the shore.

The duty to the king for permission to

trade in this country, was, on a ship of three masts, twenty-one slaves; that is to say, the amount in goods of twenty-one slaves, according to the existing prices at the time:—for a brig, or schooner, fourteen; and seven for a cutter or sloop; being, in short, seven for each mast. By this plan which the captain adopted, there was a saving of two-thirds of the duty, which must have been paid had the ship herself been entered as a trader; and, as he carried her to another country, where he had to pay the full amount of duty on her, he considered it perfectly fair, to subject himself only to that proportion of impost, which was more than equivalent to the quantity of trade he meant, or indeed, was necessary for him, to transact at this place.

An officer was placed in this cutter to communicate occasionally between the captain and myself, and bring up more goods, or carry down the slaves as might be necessary.

My establishment as a factor, consisted of six hammock-men (whose office resembles that of palanquin-bearers in India), two factory-men, an interpreter, cook, washerwoman, and some porters.

I had apartments, and store-houses in the fort, and messed with Governor Abson in the great hall, at his particular request.

On landing in this country, I was forcibly struck, as a European for the first time naturally must be, by the novelty of every scene. The grand tropical trees and other productions, so different from any I had been accustomed to see; the

delicious fruits which I had been used to consider as the greatest rarities, growing spontaneously in all directions; the black population (with but few exceptions,) in the costume of nature, their manners and habits, the appearance of their houses, in short, the *tout ensemble* was well calculated to make a strong impression on the mind, and to excite the wonder and amazement of a *Johnny Newcome.*

Whydah was once an independent kingdom; but, in the year 1727, was conquered by Guadja Trudo, the King of Dahomy. Grigwee, the present capital, lies a few miles up from the sea-coast, and may contain about twenty thousand inhabitants. Three European forts, or settlements, have been established there for the last hundred years,

by the English, French, and Portuguese, for the purpose of carrying on a trade in slaves, ivory, palm-oil, &c. They are quadrangular buildings, of considerable size, and are surrounded by dry moats, across which are moveable bridges of boards. The angles, or bastions, were each supplied with some pieces of cannon, but so honey-combed and corroded, that I apprehend, there would have been considerably less danger incurred by those fired at, than by the persons firing them. Three or four, however, were sound, and employed in saluting.

The walls and houses of the forts are formed merely of the clay, or earth, taken from the ditches, which, mixed up with water into a consistence for building, becomes in time, and by exposure to the

sun, almost as hard as brick. The native buildings are also constructed of this simple material, which they call *swish*, and are roofed with rafters of bamboo and thatch.

Dahomy, including the subjugated districts, extends at least a hundred and fifty miles into the interior; its breadth is not well ascertained. The sea-coast is in 6° 12′. north latitude, more or less, for no very correct survey of this coast has ever appeared. Abomey, the capital, lies from eighty to ninety miles north, a little westerly of this, in about 3° east longitude.

It is bounded by the Mahee and Ashantee countries to the northward and westward; by Eyeo, to the north-east; Popoe is on the south-west side;

and several inconsiderable states, such as Jacquin and Badagry, intervene between it and the kingdom of Benin, to the south-eastward.

The land rises with a gentle ascent from the coast to the interior; and, for an hundred miles in that direction (the usual distance travelled by Europeans, but much farther by other accounts,) no greater eminences are met with than may be observed in Hyde Park.

The ground, to the greatest depth yet examined, is a strong red-coloured loam; and, strange to say, not only are rocks unknown, but there is not even a pebble of the size of a walnut to be found in the whole country.

On such a soil, and under the influence of a tropical sun, it is not wonderful that

vegetation should appear in its richest and most luxuriant form. Many of the trees are of such gigantic bulk that canoes (which they use on their lakes only) capable of containing with ease, from seventy to an hundred men *, have been formed from their trunks, and their immense height, added to the great spread of their branches, has a very noble appearance. The sugar cane when it is raised here, grows vigorously to an uncommon size. The yams, corn, and callavances, which they plant in alternate rows, give a very delightful aspect to their fields.

The cultivation of a very small pro-

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* Canoes are mentioned by unquestionable authority, which navigate the rivers farther to the eastward, of much greater dimensions than even these, and mounting a gun in the prow.

portion of the country (and that generally in the immediate neighbourhood of their towns) is found fully adequate, to the ample supply of its present population, more especially as their crops are extremely abundant. The sensitive plant seems to be the commonest and most troublesome weed about Whydah.

In the opinion of one of the latest governors we have had on the establishment in this country, (and one whose general knowledge of Africa is admitted to be considerable *,) the tea-tree flourishes spontaneously here. To be independent of the Chinese for this commodity has always been a desirable object; for they are a flatulent self-con-

* Mr. James.

ceited race of barbarians, who constantly endeavour to humiliate, and never fail to vex, cheat, and annoy all those who have any dealings with them.

It has been proposed to cultivate the tea-tree in the Brazils, (where it thrives very well,) and also at our own colony of the Cape of Good Hope. The grand objection to these plans, is not the difficulty of cultivating tea there, or in a great variety of other places, but, that it can nowhere be so cheaply grown as in China, where human labour is infinitely more easily obtained than it ever can be in any European colony whatever.

This objection however would be removed should it be found that it is indigenous to Dahomy, where there is land lying waste sufficient to supply the article far

beyond the utmost demand of this country,—where it can be raised at the most trifling expense,—where our manufactures (instead of our bullion, as in China,) would be cheerfully received in return;—and where the king and the people are most anxious to renew their commercial intercourse with us,—an intercourse of that nature also, which would brighten the present almost hopeless prospect of civilizing Africa. I well remember noticing the shrub in question, but made no experiment as to its quality, being in those days (with shame I confess it,) more attached to matters of merriment and fun, than the pursuit of natural history, or botanical research.

Dahomy produces, in great perfection, all the immense variety of fine fruits

found within the torrid zone, with some peculiar to itself, and among others one of a most singular quality :—It is not unlike a ripe coffee-berry, and does not at first appear to have a superior degree of sweetness, but it leaves in the mouth so much of that impression, that a glass of vinegar tastes like sweet wine, and the sourest lemon like a ripe orange: sugar is quite an unnecessary article in tea or coffee; in fact, the most nauseous drug seems sweet to whoever chews this fruit; and its effect is not worn away until after several meals. It is generally called the miraculous berry, but Mr. Dalzel has applied to it the term *Cerasus Oxyglycus.*

Whoever eats this berry in the morning, must be content at least for that day, to

forego the natural flavour of every kind of food, whether animal or vegetable, for all will be alike saccharine to the palate; and the most ridiculous effect is often produced by playing tricks upon those who are not aware of its peculiar property. Mr. Dalzel (who had been Governor at Whydah, and ultimately Governor in Chief in the Company's service,) attempted to carry the shrub which produces this fruit to the West Indies, but it died on the passage. He likewise endeavoured to preserve the berries, but in every mode of preparation they lost their extraordinary quality.

During the rainy season the thunder and lightning are often terrible. The clouds literally pour forth torrents which

frequently inundate, and transform into lakes the lower grounds.

There are no hurricanes of such duration as in the West Indies, or in the oriental seas, but tornadoes occur, which blow with equal violence whilst they last, which is seldom longer than a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, and in this short space of time, the wind veers round to every point of the compass.

The Harmattan is also a very peculiar wind, blowing from the interior of the country, respecting the cause of which, there are various theories. Its effects are very remarkable. It completely withers and dries up the leaves of trees and the lighter vegetables; and the natives take this opportunity of setting fire to the long

grass which they may have occasion to clear away. The boards of books are bent back as if they had been placed before a fire, and it is often necessary to wet the outside of casks to prevent the seams from opening and leaking out their contents. It is observed to arrest the progress of epidemic and contagious diseases, such for example as the small-pox.

During its continuance, there exists a density or haziness of the atmosphere, enabling the eye to look at the sun, which has then a red appearance.

Cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry of every description are found in Dahomy in greater plenty than in most other parts of Africa; and milk is used here as food, a custom not generally practised, on

any other part of the south-west coast of this continent." It produces a great variety of game, such as hares, deer, partridges, quails, doves, pigeons, *&c.*; and those who are either too indolent, or too much engaged to follow the field sports themselves, may obtain any quantity of game they please, by giving a little powder to one of the natives, who repays the favour by bringing a proportion of what he kills.

The beasts of prey are numerous and dangerous, and often commit great havock among the sheep and other live stock, notwithstanding every precaution to put them in a place of security at night.

The tigers or leopards are not contented with what they actually carry off,

but they leave nothing alive which comes within the reach of their talons; and on more than one occasion, during my residence in William's Fort, the stockyards have been found, in the morning, strewed with the mangled carcases of their various inhabitants, even to the turkeys or guinea-hens; whilst one only of their number (generally a goat or sheep) was missing, with which the enemy had managed to leap over a wall of considerable height.

The unusual lowing of the larger cattle, as well as the bustle among them, not unfrequently announced that one of these fierce intruders had got within the Fort; and on clear nights they might be seen forming something like a circle for mutual defence, with their heads outwards, ready to toss the common foe, whilst the calves

were uniformly observed within this ring.

A good mode of astonishing a tiger was practised with success during my stay here. A loaded musquet was firmly affixed in a horizontal position, about the height of his head, to a couple of stakes driven into the ground; and the piece being cocked, a string from the trigger, first leading a little towards the butt and then turning through a small ring forwards, was attached to a shoulder of mutton stuck on the muzzle of the musquet, the act of dragging off which drew the trigger, and the piece, loaded with two balls, discharged itself into the plunderer's mouth, killing him on the spot.

Mr. Robertson, in his notes on Africa, mentions a very ancient, but ingenious

and natural mode by which the natives obtain possession of the young cubs. "The men in their excursions," he says, "often find the dens of the leopard, and invariably bring away the young. Should the dam miss them, in time to overtake them, they throw one of the cubs down, which arrests her progress, as she carries it back to the den, and sometimes returns in pursuit of the remainder; but more frequently remains with the one she has secured. Joe Hornet, (he says) one of the traders at Cavally, brought me two of these cubs, and offered them as a very valuable present; very justly observing that 'there was much trouble and fear in stealing *Tigers' sons*; and that it was only for good friends that people would run the risk of obtaining them.'"

The horses of Dahomy are a small and slender breed, but extremely well shaped. When any of the chiefs ride, on occasions of ceremony, the horse is led, and several people are stationed by the side of it with their arms extended to receive the great man should he tumble off. The dogs of this country are good for nothing.

Elephants are common here, but are not tamed and used by the natives, as in India, for purposes of war or burthen; being merely taken for the sake of their ivory and their flesh which is, on particular occasions, eaten.

An animal of the hyæna tribe, called by the natives *Tweetwee*, is likewise extremely troublesome; herds of them join together, and scrape up the earth of new made graves, in order to get at the

bodies, which are not buried here in coffins. These resurrection-men, as they are sometimes termed, make, during the night a most dismal howling, and often change their note to one very much resembling the shriek of a woman in some situation of danger or distress.

Snakes of the boa species are here found of a most enormous size; many being from thirty to thirty-six feet in length, and of proportional girth. They attack alike wild and domestic beasts, and often the human kind. They kill their prey by encircling it in their folds and squeezing it to death; and afterwards swallow it entire: this they are enabled to do, by a faculty of very extraordinary expansion in their muscles, without, at the same time, impairing the

muscular action, or power. The bulk of the animals these serpents are capable of gorging would stagger belief, were the fact not so fully attested as to place it beyond doubt. The state of torpor in which they are sometimes found in the woods after a *stuffing* meal of this kind, affords the negroes an opportunity of killing them.

There is not in nature a more appalling sight than one of these monsters in full motion. It has a chilling and overpowering effect on the human frame, and it seems to inspire with the same horror every other animal, even the strongest and most ferocious, for all are equally certain of becoming victims should the snake once fasten itself upon them.

The poisonous class of serpents are

very small, that esteemed most fatal being about two and a half feet in length, and not thicker than a man's middle finger.

The religion of this country is paganism. They believe in two Beings equal in power, the one doing good, the other evil; and they pray to the demon to allow them to remain unmolested by the magicians, who are constantly endeavouring to injure them.

In Whydah, for some unaccountable reason, they worship their Divinity under the form of a particular species of snake, called *Daboa*, which is not sufficiently large to be terrible to man, and is otherwise tameable and inoffensive. These Daboas are taken care of in the most pious manner, and well fed on rats, mice or birds, in their *Fetish* houses or temples,

where the people attend to pay their adoration, and where those also who are sick or lame apply to them for assistance.

The tiger is an object of religious regard in Dahomy Proper; but they deem it the safest mode of worship to perform their acts of devotion to his skin only, after death, which is stuffed for that purpose.

From many savage nations thus worshipping animals so mischievous and formidable by their nature, it would seem that they are willing to propitiate the angry demons under the emblems which they fancy bear the greatest resemblance to them.

The people of Whydah occasionally imagine themselves inspired by the Divinity, or, as they term it, are seized by the *Fetish*; and in such cases it

becomes necessary, from the frantic manner in which they run about, to secure, and place them under charge of the Fetisheers or priests, until this fit of inspiration is over and they become themselves again.

The political management of Whydah is intrusted to a viceroy who is called the *Yavougah* (or captain of the white men) from having the shipping and strangers more immediately under his jurisdiction.

This officer, at the time of my residence in the country, was a man of majestic stature, and possessed an uncommon share of dignity, mixed with complacency of manner. His dress was generally a large hat, somewhat resembling that of a Spanish Grandee, tastefully decorated; and a

piece of damask silk (usually red) thrown over one shoulder, like a Scotch plaid; with a pair of drawers, but his arms and legs were bare, except the bracelets of silver, which encircled the arm above the elbow, with *manillas* of the same sort, and rows of coral round the wrists.

When he had any message to deliver from the king, or other public affair to transact at the European forts, it was done with much ceremony and state; his guards, musicians, umbrella-bearers, and a numerous retinue always attending him. On such occasions, it was usual for all whites (who were of sufficient rank to be admitted to the parties of the governor) to be seated in the hall of the fort; but the yavougah alone of the blacks assumed this privilege, and he was placed on a

finely-carved stool: all the rest squatting on the floor; except any one of them spoke to or was addressed by him, when the person so speaking or addressed, always appeared on his knees.

The most polished courtier of Europe, could not have deported himself more gracefully on public occasions than this man, or have carried on a conference with greater ease and affability. He was master, besides his own, of the English, French, and Portuguese languages; having resided from his birth chiefly in the vicinity of the forts, and in his younger days been much connected with them officially, as a linguist.

Although, therefore, he understood perfectly what was said to him by Mr. Abson, or any other person who might

address him in English, yet it was *etiquette* for the viceroy to be spoken to through an interpreter; and it was often amusing to see the bungling efforts of the latter in the performance of a task, which the Yavougah himself so much better understood, and which he good-humouredly (in an undertone) often assisted him to complete. After the business of ceremony was finished, he laid aside all formality and conversed in a familiar manner upon general subjects, the whole party joining convivially in a collation or repast which was always served up on such occasions.

The government of Dahomy is in the fullest sense of the word, despotism.

It is a monarchy the most unlimited and uncontroled on the face of the earth:

there being no law but the king's will, who may chop off as many heads as he pleases, whenever he is "i' the vein;" and dispose of his subjects' property as he thinks fit without being accountable to any human tribunal for his conduct. He has from three to four thousand wives, a proportion of whom, trained to arms, under female officers, constitute his body guards. As may naturally be supposed, but a few of these wives engage his particular attention.

The successor to the throne, is not announced during the king's lifetime but the moment his decease is known; this proclamation is made with all possible despatch by the proper officers, for all is murder, anarchy, and confusion in the palace until it takes place, the wives of the

late king not only breaking the furniture and ornaments, but killing each other in order to have the honour of attending their husband to the grave.

The choice usually falls on the eldest son of the late sovereign's greatest favourite, provided there exists no particular reason for setting him aside. An instance of this sort occurred however at the demise of the late king Whenoohew, where the elder son's right of primogeniture was disallowed, because one of his toes from some accident overlapped the other; and his next brother, the present king, who, with respect to form, is certainly "a marvellous proper man," was elected in his stead.

There seem to be no rank or privileges annexed to any *branches* of the royal

family; the king in his own person absorbing the undivided respect of the people. Those of his relatives whom his majesty may deign to patronise, will, of course, be more noticed by their fellow slaves; but all are alike the slaves of the king.

A person whose father had been so well supplied with wives, must naturally have an extensive connexion in the way of half brothers and sisters; and it might not, perhaps, be convenient to allow all to participate in the royal rank.

His palace at Abomey, is walled round, and consists, according to the reports of Messrs. Dalzell, Norris, and Abson, who had frequent opportunities of visiting its interior, of numerous courts connected with each other, occupying

in the whole a space full as large as St. James's Park.

The first minister is called the *Tamegan*, and he is the only man in the country whose head the king cannot cut off at pleasure. By some ancient regulation, he who attains this rank has that very essential part of his person secured to him, perhaps that he may honestly speak his mind to the king without fear of consequences. The second, or *Mahou*, is the master of the ceremonies, whose office it is to receive and introduce all strangers, whether black or white, and also to take care of them during their stay at court, and to see them well fed and lodged, with all their attendants. The third officer in the state is the *Yavougah* of Whydah; and the fourth is the *Jahou* or master of the horse, who

is likewise the chief executioner, and has the duty of superintending the numerous decapitations which in various ways occur. The *Agaow* is the commander in chief of the army, and has under him divers subordinate general officers.

There are entertained about the court a number of king's messengers, called *Halfheads*, because one side of their heads is always shaved whilst the hair on the other is allowed to grow to its full length. They are men who have distinguished themselves in battle, and wear as the badge of their office, strings of the teeth of those enemies they have actually killed with their own hands, slung round their necks, like the collar of an order.

These extraordinary looking couriers when sent on any mission, are never per-

mitted to walk, but run at full speed, and are relieved at certain distances on the road, by relays of others, who push on in the same manner on receiving their orders, which they transfer from one to the other with the greatest exactness.

When carrying a message to any European at the forts of Grigwee, they repair first to the Yavougah (or in his absence, to the next in command), who instantly accompanies them to the individual, be it even at midnight, or the subject itself ever so unimportant: and, as they come in great bustle, serious alarm is apt to be excited, more especially when enemies are known to be in the vicinity, for it is impossible at once to judge from the tumultuous noise about the gate whether the visitors are friends or foes.

A very fatal occurrence had nearly taken place on an occasion of this sort, when a night attack on the town by a large body of the enemy who had advanced into the neighbourhood, was anticipated, and the Viceroy was on the point of being fired upon from the windows of the fort, when we luckily distinguished his voice in the crowd, thundering for admittance. We had removed, for greater security, the boards which formed the bridge *, and the Viceroy and his attendants were scrambling across the beams and up the side of the moat in all directions. It turned out that all this uproar was occasioned by one of

* Mr. Gordon, with the white seamen, and others belonging to another English factory, had this night collected, for mutual support, within the walls of our garrison.

the *halfheads,* who had arrived with a message to me from the king, requesting that a brass blunderbuss and a piece of scarlet cloth, which he had heard were in my possession, might be reserved for him particularly !

A day or two after this we had a view of a Dahomian army, consisting of five or six thousand men, who bivouacqued in the neighbourhood of Grigwee: they were a wild looking group, and armed in the most irregular manner; some with musquets, others with swords, spears and clubs; they seemed, however, to be very orderly, and proceeded in good spirits, in chase of the foe, who had, by this time, retired towards their own borders, and as we afterwards learnt, the Dahomians took ample vengeance on

the enemy's territory for their irruption into Whydah. The general officers were distinguished by large umbrellas; and when any of that class are killed in action, they say, figuratively, that on such an occasion we lost so many umbrellas.

In delivering what is termed the *King's word*, the messenger as well as all those around him fall prostrate on the ground, and cover their heads with dust, or with mud if it rains; so that they often display very hideous figures, with their black bodies and the wool of their heads, thus bedaubed with red puddle.

The ministers of state, in communicating with the King, approach within a certain distance of him crawling on their hands and knees, and at last they prostrate themselves, kiss the ground, cover their

Dalzel's Dahomy. Published by I. Murray, London, 1820. I. Clark Etch.t

THE KING of DAHOMY'S LEVEE.

heads with dust, then make their speech, and receive his reply. His majesty usually sits, on public occasions, under a rich canopy, on a finely-carved stool or throne, surrounded by his women; some with whisks driving away the flies, one with a handkerchief to wipe his mouth, and another on her knees holding a gold cup for him to spit in as he smokes.

All the districts and towns in this country have each their particular *caboceers*, or magistrates, who regulate their own departments, and distribute justice except in some extraordinary cases which are referred to Abomey to be laid before the king, whose decision is, of course, final. However absolute and independent the king himself may be, yet others in official

stations must be careful how they conduct themselves, for any well-founded complaint of oppression or injustice, would place the head of the aggressor, in a very awkward predicament. During the time I was in the country, the chief magistrate of a district, for some iniquitous transaction, was ordered by the king not to shave his beard, pare his nails, or wash himself for a certain number of moons, and in this dirty state to sit daily at the palace-gate several hours for public inspection.

They are very rigorous in the treatment of shuffling or equivocating witnesses, and whoever is proved to have borne false witness against his neighbour is punished with death. The body of any person committing suicide is not allowed to be buried, but thrown out into

the fields to be devoured by wild beasts. Of this I saw one instance.

Their marriages, like those of most barbarous nations, are settled by the bridegroom paying a certain sum for the woman, which is calculated at the rate of one or more slaves, or moveable property in shells, cloth, or other articles, to the amount of the specified number of slaves. "Polygamy is allowed to any extent, and it is generally carried as far as the means of the gentlemen will admit; as after a short period (or honey-moon) the women are employed in the fields and plantations, and usually are no better situated than the common servants of their husbands."

Adultery is punished by slavery or the value of a slave, by the offender, and the

lady likewise subjects herself to be sold; but it is remarked, that this measure is seldom resorted to, and it sometimes happens that a handsome wife is repeatedly turned to advantage by her husband in alluring the unwary into heavy damages.

The state of woman, is, upon the whole, very abject here. Wives approach their husbands with every mark of the humblest submission. In presenting him even with the calabash containing his food, after she has cooked it, she kneels, and offers it with an averted look, it being deemed too bold to stare him full in the face. By thus constantly practising genuflexion upon the bare ground, their knees in time become almost as hard as their heels

A mutinous wife, or a vixen, some-

times the treasure and delight of an Englishman,—the enlivener of his fireside,—and his safeguard from *ennui*, is a phenomenon utterly unknown in Dahomy,—that noble spirit which animates the happier dames in lands of liberty being here, alas! extinguished and destroyed.

In most nations a numerous progeny is considered a blessing, as being likely to prop the declining years of their parents, but Mr. Norris remarks, that "in Dahomy, children are taken from their mothers at an early age, and distributed in villages remote from the places of their nativity; where they remain with but little chance of being ever seen, or at least recognized, by their parents afterwards. The motive for this is, that there may be no family connexions or combi-

nations; no associations that might prove injurious to the king's unlimited power. Hence each individual is detached and unconnected; and, having no relative for whom he is interested, is solicitous only for his own safety, which he consults by the most abject submission. Paternal affection, and filial love, therefore can scarcely be said to exist. Mothers instead of cherishing, endeavour to suppress those attachments for their offspring, which they know will be violated, as soon as their children are able to undergo the fatigue of being removed from them." Notwithstanding Mr. Norris seems to have been a very accurate and intelligent observer, and had seen much of these people, I cannot help thinking he must be mistaken as to the practice

being general, for I never saw or heard of any case of it, at least in my neighbourhood; although I can easily imagine some state jealousy or other causes, may have occasionally produced many particular instances of this kind.

At a particular period of the year, generally in April or May, a grand annual Festival is held, which may, with much propriety, be termed a *Carnival*. On this occasion the chief Magistrates, or *Caboceers*, of the different towns or districts; the governors of the English, French, and Portuguese settlements, are expected to attend at the capital with their respective retinues; and the captains of ships and factors trading at Whydah, usually take this opportunity of paying their respects to the king. A great part of the popu-

lation, in fact, repair to Abomey which resembles some great fair, from the number of booths and tents erected in it for various purposes.

It is at this time also, that the revenue is collected; all the people either bringing or sending their respective quotas to the royal treasury. The governors of the forts, and other whites who think proper to make their appearance there, carry with them likewise some present, such as a roll of silk, or other convenient and suitable article; but this is not understood to be in the way of tax or tribute, for a return of equal value is always made to them by the king, who is besides at the expense of providing for them during their stay at his court. White men are received there with every mark of respect, and even sa-

luted by the discharge of cannon*. There is an extraordinary mixture of ferocity and politeness in the character of these people: though terrible and remorseless to their enemies, nothing can exceed their urbanity and kindness to strangers.

Should any white person be taken ill at Abomey, the king sends the Mayhou, or some other great officer, to make daily enquiries about the state of his malady, and desiring to know in what way he can assist or promote his recovery.

Notwithstanding the king exacts from his own subjects the most humiliating and abject prostrations on approaching his person, yet he admits Europeans to his

* These cannon were brought to Abomey by Guadjo Trudo, from some place to the eastward of Whydah which he conquered and where there was a Dutch fort.

presence without the least scruple; requiring from them only those marks of respect which they may think fit to perform, in the style of salutation they have been accustomed to in their own countries. They are allowed to be seated in his company, and he personally pays them great attention. Cooks are procured who understand the mode of preparing European dishes; even table cloths, with knives and forks, although never used by themselves, are furnished; and, in short, every thing which can contribute to their comfort, is provided with eastern hospitality.

They are likewise entertained with feasts, music, public dances, processions of the king's women, and the exhibition of sports and games.

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Dalzel's Dahomy. Published by I. Murray, London, 1820. Clark Etch.

PUBLIC PROCESSION of the KING'S WOMEN.

But amidst this general enjoyment of festivity and mirth, deeds are done from which the civilized mind recoils with horror, and which it cannot contemplate without feeling an ardent desire to see mankind raised from that state of savage ignorance and superstition, which leads to acts so monstrous and unnatural.

In order *to water* with their blood the graves of the king's ancestors, and to supply them with servants of various descriptions in the other world, a number of human victims are yearly sacrificed in solemn form; and this carnival is the period at which these shocking rites are publicly performed.

Scaffolds are erected outside the palace wall, and a large space fenced in round them. On these the king, with the white

strangers who think proper to attend, are seated, and the ministers of state are also present in the space beneath. Into this field of blood the victims are brought in succession, with their arms pinioned, and a *Fetisheer* laying his hand on the devoted head, pronounces a few mystical words, when another man standing behind with a large scimitar, severs the sufferer's head from his body, generally at a single blow, and each repetition of this act is proclaimed by loud shouts of applause from the surrounding multitude, who affect to be highly delighted with the power and magnificence of their sovereign.

His bards, or laureats, join also at this time, in bawling out his *strong names* (their term for titles of honour) and sing songs in his praise. These scenes

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SACRIFICE of VICTIMS.

are likewise *enlivened* by a number of people engaged in a savage dance around the scaffolds: should the foot of one of these performers slip, it is considered an ill omen; the unfortunate figurante is taken out of the ring, and his head instantly struck off, whilst the dance continues without interruption, as if nothing unusual had occurred.

The people thus sacrificed, are generally prisoners of war, whom the king often puts aside for this purpose, several months previous to the celebration of his horrid festival; should there be any lack of these, the number is made up from the most convenient of his own subjects. There are years in which they have *single*, and others, in which they have *double customs*. One of the latter occurred when I was there, and an enormous

number (several hundreds) were said to have fallen. But the amount, probably, was considerably exaggerated; for, as Mr. Abson had dispensed with viewing this part of the ceremony, he could only judge from the report of those who were anxious to magnify the grandeur of their king, and Mr. James who, three different years, took the trouble to count the victims, never reckoned more than sixty-five, on any one occasion.

Their bodies are either thrown out into the fields to be devoured by vultures and wild beasts, or hung by the heels in a mutilated state, upon the surrounding trees, a practice exceedingly offensive in so hot a climate. The heads are piled up in a heap, for the time, and afterwards disposed of in decorating the walls of the royal *simbomies*, or palaces,

some of which are two miles in circumference, and often require a renewal and repair of these ornaments.

Adahoonza, in 1785, after a successful attack upon *Badagry*, having a great number of victims to sacrifice, ordered their heads to be applied to this purpose. Mr. Abson, in his account, says, "the person to whom the management of this business had been committed, having neglected to make a proper calculation of his materials, had proceeded too far with his work, when he found that there would not be a sufficient number of skulls to adorn the whole palace; he, therefore, requested permission to begin the work anew, that he might, by placing them farther apart, complete the design in a regular manner. But the king would

by no means give his consent to this proposal, observing, 'that he would soon find a sufficient number of *Badagry heads* to render the plan perfectly uniform,' and learning that a hundred and twenty-seven were required to complete this extraordinary embellishment, he ordered that number of the captives to be brought forth, and slaughtered in cold blood."

Messrs. Norris and Abson who had frequent opportunity of visiting the bedchamber of *Bossa Ahadee*, found the passage leading to it paved with human skulls. They were those of his more distinguished adversaries captured at different times, and placed in that situation "that he might nightly enjoy the savage gratification of trampling on the heads of

his enemies." The top of the little wall which surrounded this detached apartment, was adorned likewise with their jaw-bones. Whatever may have been the frailties of Ahadee and his successors, it would seem from all this that the dread of ghosts and hobgoblins formed no part of their characters.

From Mr. Abson, who had lived thirty-seven years in this country, the greater part of which he had been governor of William's Fort, the African Company's chief settlement in this quarter, and who, *ex officio*, attended at the celebration of these annual *festivities*, I had many relations of the barbarous acts which he had witnessed.

The immolation of victims is not confined to this particular period, for at any

time should it be necessary to send an account to his forefathers of any remarkable event, the king despatches a courier to the shades, by delivering his message to whoever may happen to be near him, and then ordering his head to be chopped off immediately; and, it has not unfrequently happened during the present reign, that, as something new has occurred to the king's mind, another messenger (as Mr. C—nn—g very justly observed, like the postscript of a letter) has instantly followed on the same errand, perhaps in itself of the most trivial kind.

It is considered an honour where his majesty personally condescends to become the executioner, in these cases; an office in which the present king prides himself in being very expert. The go-

vernor was present on one occasion, when a poor fellow, whose fear of death, outweighing the sense of the honour conferred on him, on being desired by the king to carry some message to his father, humbly declared on his knees, that he was unacquainted with the way; on which the tyrant vociferated "I'll shew you the way," and, with one blow, made his head fly many yards from his body, highly indignant that there should have been the least expression of reluctance.

The performance of the annual sacrifices is considered a duty so sacred, that no allurement in the way of gain—no additional price which the white traders can offer for slaves,—will induce the king to spare even a single victim of the established number; and he is equally in-

exorable with respect to the chiefs of his enemies, who are never, on any account, permitted to live if they fall into his hands.

I had once occasion to witness a very marked instance of this vindictive and unrelenting spirit. In a warlike excursion towards the Mahee, or Ashantee borders, an enemy's town was surprised, and a great number of the inhabitants were either killed or made prisoners; but, especial care was taken that the head of the prince of that district should be sent to Abomey, and that every branch of his family, should, if possible, be exterminated; for it was one which had often given the Dahomian forces a great deal of trouble. A merciless massacre of these individuals therefore took place, in obedience to strict injunctions to that

effect; and, it was believed, that not one of the breed was left alive.

A youth, however, about seventeen years of age, one of the sons of the obnoxious prince, had managed to conceal his real quality, and not being pointed out, succeeded in passing among the crowd of prisoners to the Dahomian capital, where, after selecting that proportion thought necessary for the ensuing sacrifices, the captors sent the remainder to Grigwee, to be sold at the factories. This young man happened to be purchased by me, and he lived thenceforth in the fort, in a sort of general rendezvous or trunk, as it is called, for those belonging to that department.

In a very short time after this transaction, it somehow transpired at Abomey,

that there yet lived this remnant of the enemy's family; and in order to trace him out (for the scent had, in some degree, been lost, not knowing whether he had been disposed of to the English, French, or Portuguese, or whether he was not actually embarked,) the king fell upon a scheme, which strongly displays that species of cunning and artifice so often observed among savages.

Some of his Halfheads (who may very appropriately be termed his *mortal* messengers, in contradistinction to the *immortals* sent to the shades,) arrived one evening at the fort, and with the Coke (a stern and hard-hearted villain) who, in the absence of the Yavougah, was the next caboceer, demanded admittance in the king's name, prostrating themselves

as usual, and covering their heads with dust. On entering, they proceeded immediately to that quarter where the slaves were, and repeated the ceremony of kissing the ground before they spoke the *king's word*, that is to say, delivered his message. The Coke then made a long harangue, the purport of which was to signify the king's regret that animosity should have so long existed between him and the chief of that country which he had just despoiled, and to express his sorrow for the fate of a family which had suffered from his displeasure, through false accounts and misrepresentations. For this reason he was now most anxious to make every reparation in his power to a son yet remaining of that prince, and would readily re-establish him in the rank

and possessions of his father, could he only find him out. Completely duped by this wile, the unsuspecting lad exultingly exclaimed "I am the son of the prince!" Then replied the Coke, with a hellish joy, at having succeeded in his object, "you are just the person we want;" upon which these Halfheads seized him, and began to bind his hands. Finding by this time the real state of the case, which at first it was impossible to comprehend, I strongly protested against their seizing a slave whom I had regularly purchased, and complained loudly of the insult offered to the Company's Fort—but all in vain. I then earnestly entreated them to offer the king his own price, or selection of goods, and to beg, as a favour to me, that he might be spared, strongly urging the plea

also, that when once embarked, he would be as free from every apprehension respecting him as if he killed him.

The Coke coolly replied, that I need give myself no farther trouble to make proposals, for he dared not repeat one of them to the king; and I was at last, after an ineffectual struggle, compelled to witness, with the most painful emotion, this ill-fated youth dragged off in a state of the gloomiest despair:—a despair rendered more dismal from the fallacious glimpse of returning happiness by which he had been so cruelly entrapped.

He was immediately hurried away, and murdered, to glut the vengeance of this pitiless and sanguinary barbarian.

Sometime in May (for I have no precise dates,) the captain wrote to inform

me that he had despatched the Trusty to the West Indies, and as from circumstances it was impossible for me to join her in time, he had, therefore, removed into her the surgeon of the Princess Amelia (belonging to the same owners), and my name was, of course, shifted to the books of the latter ship; a regular exchange in fact taking place. The captain himself was now rather in the character of a supercargo, or manager, for the interests of the house,—having a general charge, and being attached to no particular ship.

Very shortly after this period I was delighted to see an English ship enter the road of Whydah, and soon after perceived, that the French flag, flying on board a ship of that nation, then trading

there, was hauled down, and ours hoisted in its stead.

It appeared that war had again broken out, and that a ship at Liverpool having been, with great judgment and spirit of enterprise, well equipped and numerously manned in anticipation of the event, sailed instantly on the declaration of hostilities, with a letter of marque, and pounced unexpectedly on several French vessels lying on the coast of Africa, which became an easy prey to her, and among others this ship.

There was at this time another French ship, frigate-built, and mounting thirty guns, with a numerous crew, trading at Lagos. In our correspondence, the captain had often complained of her, as interfering extremely, both with himself and

the other English ships there, as she had a better adapted cargo for that market, and therefore superior success in obtaining slaves.

I immediately despatched the cutter with a letter to inform him of the event which had occurred with us, and he forthwith decided upon the right and proper line of conduct, that of securing a good prize, and getting rid of a rival to the bargain; —or of killing two birds with one stone.

There were then at Lagos three small English ships, but very slenderly armed. My captain being still looked to as the senior, was immediately elected commodore, and with great spirit and promptitude he removed the few carronades they had among them into one ship, and manning her well with volunteers from

the others, got under weigh; and, the French ship being at anchor some miles to windward, they made a board to seaward until they could fetch, when they tacked in shore, and running alongside the enemy, hailed him to say that war had been declared between the two countries, and ordering him to strike his colours instantly, if he was not desirous of being sunk. At the same time an eighteen pounder was whistled over their heads, as hint to be quick in their determination. The astonished Frenchman seeing all hands at quarters with lighted matches, and every thing ready to commence, and being allowed no time for parley or preparation, was compelled to surrender, and La Julie, a very valuable prize, (worth at least 30,000*l.*) was immediately

taken possession of; and, all necessary arrangements being completed, she was manned, and sent to the West Indies to be sold.

The neat style in which she was thus surprised no doubt prevented the effusion of blood; for, from the force of the French ship, as well as from the intrepid character of her captain and officers, there would have been a number of broken heads on both sides had she been clear for action.

Governor Abson was, at this period, at the capital (as were the French and Portuguese governors), whither he had repaired agreeably to usage. This official duty which he was obliged to perform, was to a mind constituted like his, one of the most disagreeable kind; for the number of years he had held that si-

tuation, had not contributed to lessen his horror of those scenes of which he was the unwilling spectator, or to render callous a heart, naturally humane and benevolent.

He was taken seriously ill whilst up the country, and returned to William's Fort about the beginning of July in a state of great debility, which daily increasing, he at last expired. Having more than once expressed a desire that he might not be buried at the usual place near the magazine, but at a particular spot under a tamarind-tree in the orange-grove, which he had pointed out, that wish was complied with.

Mr. James (a very kind-hearted worthy man), the only officer of the African Company remaining in the country, was

at this time so much enfeebled by illness, as to be almost entirely confined to his room, but we managed between us to conduct the funeral, as well as we could, in military style; the governors and officers of the other European forts, with the captains of the Portuguese ships, being present, and minute-guns were fired during the ceremony. On this occasion, the spontaneous attendance of apparently the whole of the native population, many of whom seemed much affected, was a high tribute to the memory of Mr. Abson, and the best proof of the respect in which he was held.

He was a man of mild and agreeable manners; cheerful and communicative in conversation, and although he had lived almost a hermit's life, so long detached

from the world, in this distant and secluded part of Africa, yet from much reading his mind was stored with that sort of knowledge which books and the public prints could supply; and from this source it was wonderful to observe the clear information he seemed to possess respecting all interesting matters in England, as well as his acquaintance with the various public and political characters of the day. Had he survived a little longer to have given the result of his observations on the state of Africa in his immediate vicinity, it would have formed a very important and valuable addition to our information on this interesting subject.

Mr. Abson had four children by one of the native women;—three sons and one daughter.

George, the eldest, (who at this time was in a neighbouring country on business,) had been educated in England; but the two younger boys (who were mere children,) with Sally, their sister, had never left the country.

The latter was about twenty years of age, had a fine, animated, expressive countenance, and was remarkable for the elegance and symmetry of her form. She dressed most probably according to some fashion of her own, wearing merely a piece of cotton, or silk cloth wrapped loosely round, extending from the breast to a little below the knees, with a sort of shawl or scarf thrown across the shoulder, leaving one breast with the arms and legs exposed. She certainly borrowed no aid from foreign ornament; but nature had

done enough, for in her simple and sylvan attire, she was truly beautiful. She knew England only from listening to the tales of her father, but she was proud of her English blood; seemed on that account, to consider herself of superior degree; and in her carriage exhibited a wild, yet graceful air of dignity.

When in the company of her elder brother, she had a manifest advantage in point of manner. His, was an unsuccessful attempt at what now o'days would be called *dandyism* or spurious gentility, airs he had acquired when *at home* for his education. Hers was frank and easy; for never having been conscious of a superior, she had had none to imitate, and was therefore free from every awkward affectation and constraint, ex-

cept that instinctively felt, because implanted by nature in the sex.

The king of Dahomy had repeatedly demanded her as a wife; but neither herself, nor her father, would ever for a moment listen to the proposal.

Since she had grown up, she had a house or cottage of her own near the orange grove, with a little establishment, and slaves to attend her; but on her father returning sick from Abomey she again took up her residence in the fort; became his nurse; attended him constantly with the most affectionate care; and when he died nothing could exceed the poignancy of her grief. She followed the procession to the place of interment, and when the ceremony was finished, flung herself on the grave

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SALLY ABSON.

overwhelmed with the deepest sorrow.

Her situation was very peculiar. Her mother was dead, and had she been alive, the relationship on that side, in such a country, could not have extended beyond that individual. To her father she had been accustomed to look up with respect and affection, because she had seen him revered and esteemed by all who knew him. During his life, she had held rather a prominent place; but his death in a moment extinguished every hope of happiness, and left her a helpless stranger on her native soil.

Under such circumstances it was not wonderful that she clung to me as her friend and protector, and my sympathy was never so strongly, perhaps never so

justly, excited. Mr. Abson had always treated me with a degree of friendship and paternal regard, which deserved my warmest gratitude; and during that seasoning, or fever, which Europeans must undergo in first landing in such a climate, I may fairly say I was preserved from death by the unremitting attention of his daughter, who watched me with the kindest solicitude.

I soothed her with the promise, that when the ship came for me, she also (as I knew the captain, for the sake of the father, would do every thing to serve her,) should be carried with us to some of the settlements to windward, where the English power was more respected; and where, under the protection of those [illegible] had served under and been attached [illegible]

her father, she might, on the remains of his property, live in comfort and security.

She continued regularly to appear at the mess-table, as she had been wont to do during her father's illness, but generally sat there abstracted and regardless of the food; and for the next three or four days wandered between the fort and the orange-grove in the manner of one who had some dismal foreboding. At last she suddenly disappeared. Inquiring for her at breakfast-time, the servants made no reply, but hung down their heads and looked terrified and confused. Not being able, either by persuasion or threats, to obtain any information from them, I proceeded to search about in all directions but without success. Her cottage I

found totally deserted, and began to think (what I yet could hardly permit myself to believe,) that she had killed herself.

At last, *Ramonde*, an old and faithful domestic of the late governor, who had followed me until we had got into a retired spot where he thought none could see us, whispered me that a number of king's half-heads had arrived at midnight and carried her off to Abomey. I imprecated ten thousand curses on the head of this ruthless tyrant, and every slave in his dominions. Poor old Ramonde, with tears in his eyes, begged me to be careful, saying he was afraid to tell me any thing because I spoke so openly; "the *swish* walls can speak in this country," said he, "and the only thing which can prevent your words from reaching the king's ear,

is, that they are too strong for repetition; still somebody might say I had spoken that which they dared not repeat, which would be quite sufficient to involve me, and, perhaps, all connected with me, in some dreadful calamity."

I was fully aware that this honest creature's advice was dictated by his heart; but it was impossible, however, to suppress the indignant feeling which this atrocious act excited.

My happiness on this occasion was not increased by receiving a hint to beware of *Cudjo*, the cook, which induced me for a while to subsist almost entirely on eggs, through the shells of which I conceived they could not easily insinuate poison; but this was an irksome state, and thinking it better to be poisoned at

once, than live in constant anticipation of such an event, I recurred to my old plan of messing, and resolved to trust to Providence. Although at this time I might, from the strong measures I had witnessed, have been justified in suspecting any thing, yet, I may here remark, from more mature reflection, that not only poor Cudjo, but the Dahomian character was injured by this suspicion; for whatever acts of violence may have been done by them, they have always been committed openly and above board, nor has there been any instance of their resorting to the dark and dirty crime of poisoning.

For some months after these transactions, I remained at William's Fort, in the performance of that duty for which I had been placed there.

The black traders seldom receive payment for a slave, from the whites, at the time of delivery; but prefer promissory notes, *or books*, as they call them, expressing the different articles which have been agreed upon as the price; and, at the period of winding up accounts, they are paid the full amount of their notes together.

They are extremely remarkable for their retentive memories; for though entirely unacquainted with letters they will yet point out, with the most perfect accuracy, on those slips of paper, the name, quantity, and quality of every article written on them months before, in the order in which they were set down, however great the number of their notes may be; and all this merely from recollection.

The circulating medium in Dahomy is a species of shells called cowries, which are gathered, more particularly, on the shores of the Molucca Islands in the East Indies. Sixteen thousand of these are called an *ounce trade*, which is considered to be about forty shillings sterling in value.

The term *ounce trade* originates from the ounce of gold where that metal is the medium, although the latter is about double the value of the former. The following is the manner of reckoning the shells;

40 Cowries	1	String
5 Strings	—	Gallina
5 Gallinas	—	Aky
4 Akies	—	Cabess
4 Cabess	—	Ounce.

Cowries are in use from the Volta to Benin, and Mr. Robertson says, their

mode of counting is exactly similar all along this extent of coast. The numerals of Dahomy he gives as follows:

1 De
2 Aweh
3 Etto
4 Inee
5 Atto
6 Aeiza
7 Teway
8 Tato
9 Tene
10 Owo
15 Oato
20 Quo
25 Quato
30 Bah
35 Bahatto
40 Cadee

45 Cadee atto
50 Cadee owo.
55 Cadee owo atto
60 Cadee quo
65 Cadee quo atto
70 Cadee bah
75 Cadee bah atto
80 Caway
85 Caway atto
90 Caway owo
95 Caway owo atto
100 Caway quo
1000 Afatto, &c.

Gold and silver, although their value is perfectly understood, are not used in the shape of money; but both are manufactured into ornaments.

Their markets for the sale of the usual necessaries of life, are as well regulated

as in any part of Europe. They manufacture cotton cloths of a most excellent quality, and possessing great durability. Their dyes, especially their blues, are extremely good, and will bear washing without any material change, as long as the substance of the cloth will hang together.

For common uses they also weave grass cloths, which are always beautifully variegated, like the Highland tartan. They manage to forge arms and implements of husbandry from iron bars; and in every attempt which they have made in the arts, they have displayed great ingenuity, as well as industry.

They carry on, with their neighbours, a considerable trade in various articles of their own produce and manufacture, dur-

ing the intervals of peace, and appear to have a great commercial spirit that wants only to be properly directed.

Mr. Abson had often met at the Court of Dahomy, Arabs who had travelled across the Continent to the Gulf of Benin. Although these people had some few articles in the way of traffic, yet they were evidently not to that amount from which a profit could be derived at all proportionate to the risk and difficulties of such a journey.

They made themselves useful in various little ways as artisans, and appeared to be well received by the negroes. Most probably, under the name of merchants, they were Mahomedan missionaries; for the term *mollah*, by which they were known, is the Arabic word for priest, and they

carried about with them scraps or sentences of the Koran, which they distributed to the natives, who generally fastened them on the ends of sticks near their doors as charms against witchcraft. Mr. Dalzel, in his history of Dahomy, observes, that the king usually killed an elephant to feast these people, when their Ramadan, or Lent was over.

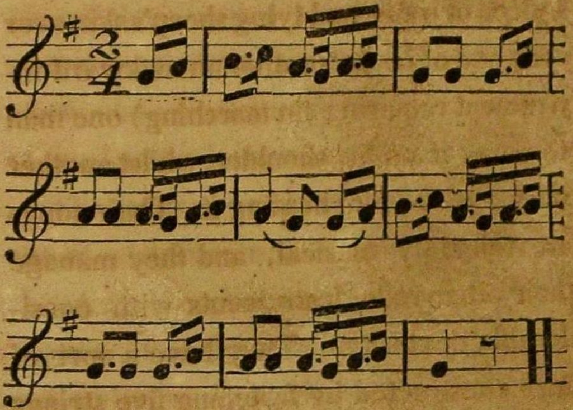
The language of Dahomy is free from the nasal and guttural sound peculiar to the nations to the westward of Accra; the words of the former generally terminating in vowels, conveying to the ear a softer and more pleasing tone.

Their names of men and places have often a compound signification. Abomey the capital, for example, means literally "Let me alone;" Whymbo, (a man's

name) "God is above;" and one of the titles, or strong names, assumed by Whenoohew, was *Scdozaw*, or "Wherever I rub, I leave my scent."

Their drums are formed by excavating a piece of a tree and tying sheep's skin over each end of it. It is rather an awkward instrument requiring (in marching) one man to carry it on his shoulder, whilst another walks behind him beating it. Their songs are tolerably musical, and they manage their other rude instruments with considerable dexterity. They have a sort of harp constructed by fastening five strings to a bow, at the end of which a calabash or gourd is fixed, which vibrates the sound with a very agreeable effect. They have also small flageolets on which they play very sweetly. The following is one of

their airs, but whether borrowed or native I cannot pretend to say, although, from its monotonous simplicity, I should think it likely to be their own.



When they meet for the purpose of dancing, it is usually by moon-light, under some large tree, where individuals, by turns, exhibit the most extravagant gestures; and, in proportion to their ability

of twisting themselves into fantastic attitudes, they are applauded with clapping of hands by the rest of the party, who formed into a circle, caper round them, and chaunt a song in general chorus. The revelry of devils and witches, as witnessed by poor Tam O'Shanter in Alloway kirk, could not have presented a more demoniac scene, than such an assembly of these naked savages.

An inferior, in this country, salutes his superior by kneeling, clapping his hands thrice, and then snapping his fingers at him, precisely as one would do in England who wished to insult another. There is nothing, perhaps, which strikes a traveller more than the strange variety in the mode of salutation, or expression of respect, in different parts of the world.

In Europe they shake hands; uncover the head and bow; scrape with the feet; embrace; kiss hands, toes, *&c.* Some of the orientals uncover their feet; lay their hands on their breasts, or salam. The Chinese thump their heads upon the ground to their sovereign; clench their fists and grin at their equals; but that manner which, more especially to an inhabitant of a cold climate, seems the most awkward and ridiculous, is practised by certain islanders of the Pacific Ocean, where, on friends meeting, they join their noses and rub them against each other.

The police of Dahomy is extremely strict, and no stranger, whether white or black, can move in any direction without being under surveillance, although it is

so adroitly managed that he discovers no appearance of this *espionage*. One may travel right and left in the country without asking permission but if a man wishes to go afloat, even to transact business in his own ship, he must send a messenger to the viceroy to obtain a pass for that purpose, most probably to give him an opportunity of judging of the motive for going on board, that being a point where his power ceases. It is impossible to elude his vigilance by embarking secretly.

For example, were a dozen white people to send their names on the same morning, in a regular manner, by the interpreter to the viceroy, desiring a free pass to the beach, having business to perform on-board ship; that permission

would, no doubt, be granted, and a polite answer returned. A different messenger would then be despatched by the viceroy to the village between Grigwee and the sea, through which the party must pass, to give the Caboceer of that place the distinguishing marks as they had been pointed out by the first messenger, of each individual who had really demanded a pass. On their arrival at this village, although they might be perfectly correct as to number, yet, should a person appear who had not asked for leave, but had come in the room of one who had done so, he would be instantly picked out as not being one of those described by the first messenger to the viceroy.

On more occasions than one, during my stay, interlopers were detected who

thought they might pass in the throng at *Kakeraken's Kroom* (so called from the name of the Caboceer who presided at this village, or kroom), and, with all possible civility, informed there must be some mistake about their pass, and referring them back to Grigwee for an explanation.

About a year or two previous to the time now alluded to, the king of Dahomy sent two of his younger brothers on board a ship then trading at Whydah, that, (according to the phrase of the natives here,) "they might go to white man's country and learn *sense*;" the captain having promised to bring them safe back. Unfortunately, however, the captain died on the middle passage, and either from no written document being left respecting

them, or, through the culpable negligence or stupidity of the person who succeeded to the charge of the ship, they were sold as slaves at Demerara.

Through the influence of Mr. Robertson * of Liverpool, they were, on the circumstance being known, re-purchased, but not without considerable trouble and expense to the owners of the ship in which

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* This gentleman is now employed on the coast of Africa, endeavouring to establish that sort of commercial correspondence which bids fair to promote the mutual interests of the natives, and those with whom he is concerned. His public spirited enterprise deserves every success. No man, perhaps, has a more general knowledge of that line of coast, extending from Sierra Leone to the Congo, or has made more accurate observations on the manners and habits of the people, and their capabilities for improvement.—See his "*Notes on Africa.*"

they had left their country, as by some mistake two other boys had, in the first instance, been sent to England in their stead. At last, however, they returned to the coast of Africa, recommended to the care of Captain Davidson, who, from Lagos, conveyed them up to me by the cutter, with directions to pay them all due attention, and send them to Abomey.

I according received them on landing, and conducted them to Grigwee. They were neatly dressed in the manner of English boys of fourteen or fifteen years of age, with blue jackets and nankeen trowsers; but, with all this European exterior, they had scarcely set foot on their natal soil, when they began to resume their original customs by clapping their hands, snapping their fingers, and

falling on their knees to the old Caboceer when he came out, as usual, to inspect the passengers. *Kakeraken* made a distinction between them and the others present, only by taking them by the hands and raising them from the kneeling posture.

Arrived at William's Fort, I sent a messenger to the king, announcing their safe return, and adding the usual compliments which suggested themselves on such an occasion. Meantime I could not prevail on the lads to dine in the hall; they persisted in seating themselves at the head of the staircase, the Viceroy alone (or in his absence the chief Caboceer on the spot,) being allowed by their regulations to sit with a white man, and even this is mere provincial privilege

and does not extend to the court, where the king and the white men only have chairs, all others, however high their rank, sitting or lying on the ground.

The next morning I found their sable highnesses naked, having completely disencumbered themselves of the English costume.

The king occasionally confers the title of *white man* on some of his subjects, which authorizes them to assume the European dress, to carry an English umbrella, wear shoes, and in short to play the parts of white men in all respects.

But, whether from his not thinking proper, or more probably from its not occurring to him, to whitewash his brothers, notwithstanding they had been in England, they were of course obliged to

resume their original habits. About two days afterwards some Halfheads arrived at the fort with a civil message from the king in answer to mine, and conducted the boys to Abomey.

As no complaint was ever made of their having been treated in any way contrary to their expectations, it seems likely they had never been fully aware that so great a mistake had taken place respecting them. At Demerara, probably, they had learnt but little *sense;* and in England still less, from the shortness of their stay there. What new accomplishments, therefore, they did possess, must have been acquired on shipboard, the best school in the world for bringing raw people to their senses.

Soon after this I received intimation

from the captain to break up my establishment and join him at Lagos, as the Princess Amelia was soon to proceed to the West Indies. I accordingly sent to the king for my pass to leave the country, having finished my business; but, after some shuffling and evasion, I was at last distinctly informed, that no permission would be granted, it being resolved, for special reasons, to detain me as a slave to the king, but these reasons they did not think proper at this time to explain. It may be right to remark that the term *king's slave*, as here used, meant rather a state prisoner, than one who had actually to perform a laborious duty; for nothing of this sort occurred, and they continued to treat me with the usual degree of respect and attention. But where a language is

not, perhaps, very copious in itself, and where good translators are scarce, we must take their expressions in the best way they can give them.

In the hands of this barbarian who had given such decided proofs of a wayward disposition, and a determination to gratify his whims and humours at all hazards, I had now before me the bleakest prospect imaginable. But having somewhere heard that the surest plan for the enjoyment of happiness is never to anticipate misery, and always to laugh at misfortune when it comes, I endeavoured to act on it as well as I could; and instead of useless repining, set all my wits to works in devising some scheme for my liberation or escape. Meanwhile, I again despatched the cutter to Lagos, to inform the captain

of my situation, and desiring his advice in this dilemma.

By her return, he recommended me to use every exertion in my power to come to an understanding with these people, and expressing his hope that my detention proceeded from a mere temporary act of caprice on the part of the king which would soon blow over; kindly assuring me, at the same time, that no effort of his should be spared to obtain my freedom, and that I need be under no alarm of being left unprotected and forgotten, as he was to remain some time longer on the coast to conduct certain affairs, about which he had received particular directions from England.

At last, after many solicitations, I was informed by my black friends that my

case was to be investigated; and, for that purpose I was desired to repair, with my interpreter to the house (I think) of *Johatoo*, one of the king's traders, where a *palaver* was to be held on me.

The term *palaver*, from the Portuguese expression *palabras*, or words, is one of rather wide and general signification on the coast of Africa, and means any law-suit, quarrel, disputation, or, as in the present instance, court of inquiry.

At Johatoo's I found assembled, in an arbour at the end of a court adjoining his house, a council literally of the elders, consisting of about a dozen of the most ancient men of the town, who, it appeared, had been selected as commissioners on this occasion. I afterwards learnt that the youngest member of this

party was upwards of eighty years of age. The frosted wool on their heads, and their white bushy beards, contrasted with their black skins, had a very striking and venerable appearance.

I now entered warmly into the grievance I laboured under in being refused permission to depart, and expatiated, as I imagined, with great eloquence, on the disadvantages which must result to the country itself from such arbitrary and unjust proceedings; it being natural to expect that white men, under existing circumstances, would abandon Dahomy, and seek for trade among other people, where they were not subjected to such vexation and oppression, and concluded by desiring to know the reason of my detention.

They listened to all this with much grave attention, and then replied that the king had detained me, on three different grounds.

First.—Because, whilst I had been trading for, and communicating with, a ship of three masts, the duty to the king had only been paid on a one-mast vessel; by which he had been defrauded *.

Secondly.—Because, an English ship had attacked and captured a French ship which was trading peaceably in Whydah road, thereby depriving the king of the

* It was subsequently ascertained that one R——n in the company's service had sent a report to the king, impressing him with this idea in order to be revenged on the captain for having refused to accede to some unreasonable request which he had made.

benefit of that vessel's commerce; that I had, on this occurrence, assembled all the people of my factory on the bridge of the fort, and there given three cheers in honour of an event which was very injurious to the king's interest; and had otherwise displayed great joy and satisfaction on the occasion, by feasting some white men in the hall of the fort, who were of the same way of thinking as myself, and also by distributing liquor and cowries among my dependants.

Thirdly.—They objected to my leaving the country, whilst I had yet goods remaining; as the re-embarkation of them would reflect discredit on the country, by inducing a belief that there was not the same demand in Dahomy, as in other places, for the manufactures of white men.

I replied to the first charge, by stating what they well knew to be true; that the slaves I had purchased were by no means equal to the number necessary even for a one-mast vessel, and, therefore, the fair and reasonable amount of duty had been fully paid; and no fraud could be said to have been committed unless a greater proportion had been embarked, than that established for the size of the cutter.

As to the communication with the three-mast vessel, it was only of that kind which had existed at all times, and at all parts of the coast, between ships belonging to the same owners.

On the second charge I remarked, that whatever share myself or those connected with me might have had in the capture

of a French ship in Lagos Bay, yet we had nothing to do with the affair which occurred in Whydah road. Besides all this, even the latter ship had been taken without the limits of the Dahomian dominions, which extended no farther than the beach; and on that domain which is every where ours—the sea.

With respect to my rejoicing at this event, I asked if the people of Dahomy did not rejoice, make fetish, and offer sacrifices when they conquered or destroyed their enemies;—had I not, therefore, a right on a similar occasion to cheer and carouse if I thought proper?

As to the third difficulty, I was willing to wave any discussion about the injustice and unreasonableness of not allowing goods to be re-embarked when once

landed, whether there was a market for them or not; and to settle that point by transferring the few I had remaining to Mr. James who remained in the country, and who would readily give me either slaves or cowries for them to carry on board with me.

During this conference, which lasted between two and three hours, (for they are very slow and solemn in their deliberations,) much was said on both sides, but the foregoing comprises the substance of the whole. Before it broke up I earnestly entreated these *Justices in Eyre*, to give me the benefit of their good report, that I might have permission to leave the country; but to this solicitation they either would not, or could not, give an explicit answer, although they

seemed, throughout the discussion, to shew rather a kind and compassionate feeling, and often smiled at the earnest manner in which I pleaded my cause.

But mine being a *king's palaver*, (a sort of thing which all men of good taste in this country endeavour to avoid,) they could not be considered altogether as free agents in giving their opinion on it; and I soon had occasion to learn that all my fine speeches had been entirely thrown away; that my arguments had made no impression; and that no revocation of my doom was likely to take place.

I was now nearly at my wits' end, and almost inclined to trust for my deliverance entirely to fate; but, considering that they are not entitled to the assis-

tance of Providence who don't do all they can to help themselves, I therefore still continued to revolve new schemes for my escape.

Accident, however, which so often lends a hand to the wisest heads, and the clearest judgments, and brings about improvements in the state of affairs, (which it is by no means unusual to attribute to sagacity and foresight,) came at last to my aid.

Mr. Hamilton of Accra, who, on Mr. James's report of the death of Mr. Abson being received at head-quarters, had been commissioned to look into the state of our settlement at Whydah, and who had a discretional power to establish himself as governor there, if he thought proper, suddenly arrived at Grigwee.

This circumstance occasioned my prospects to brighten a little; for, although Mr. Hamilton, (who was a fine warm-hearted fellow,) proceeded on the usual visit to Abomey, as a matter of ceremony, yet he made at the same time, my detention the subject of serious complaint, and pointed out the evils which were likely to accrue to the country, from such extraordinary conduct.

To his fortunate arrival, therefore, and the kind interest he took in the business, I may attribute my liberation; for, notwithstanding the king, with a sullen sort of obstinacy, would not grant direct permission, as was customary, I received private intimation that my departure would not be opposed, and being too happy in any opportunity of taking my

leave of him, I made no difficulties as to the manner.

They evidently seemed to think me a troublesome character, and from external appearances, they were in some degree justified in entertaining this opinion. The shameful behaviour of the person who had raised their suspicion of having been tricked with respect to the customs, was the ground-work of this feeling, whilst the frequent departure and re-appearance of the cutter, more particularly at the time of the capture of the French ship in the road, followed by that of the other at Lagos, events in which I appeared to take a great interest, induced them to consider me, what in France is termed an *agitator*, or in England, a public disturber.

Many incautious and warm expressions also, the effect of heedless inexperience, on occurrences which I witnessed, but had no power to prevent, and on which I ought, therefore, in common prudence to have been silent, all tended to inspire them with that opinion which Eysau, my interpreter, one day thus expressed, by way of giving me a little advice, "people talk, you for war man, good: for trade man, no good."

Some circumstances now transpired concerning Sally Abson, respecting whom, since her sudden disappearance, all had been mystery and conjecture, for in a case like her's we could have found no native who would carry a message to Abomey, even in the humblest style of supplication, far less one of remonstrance

or complaint. We had represented the affair in the strongest terms to Mr. Hamilton, who was not cold in advocating her cause.

It was now ascertained, that when forcibly carried away, and hurried after a long journey into the presence of the impatient king, she, to the great horror and astonishment of all the courtiers, not only refused to kneel, or pay him the least mark of respect, but with a total disregard of life, boldly accused him of oppression and injustice, and disdainfully denied his right of control over her. The despot, in the first transport of his rage, pushed her violently and dashed her on the ground; but, as if suddenly reflecting that he might have gone too far in the outrage already committed, or more pro-

bably awed and overcome by the noble intrepidity of her conduct, he was withheld from proceeding to extremities, and merely ordered her to be instantly removed from his sight.

He never permitted her to return to Whydah, but Mr. James, (the younger brother of the gentleman already alluded to,) who has since that period been governor of William's Fort, had opportunities, in his visits to Abomey, of seeing her within the walls of the seraglio, though only at a distance, and he never was allowed to speak to her. He learnt, however, that from the moment of her seizure she had become a prey to grief, and after lingering some years in this state of despondency, sunk at last broken hearted to the grave.

Perhaps no event of my life ever made a deeper impression on my mind than the violation of poor Sally. Added to the remembrance of many generous acts of kindness which I must have been heartless to have forgotten, she so evinced the spirit of a heroine by the undaunted manner of asserting her independence in the tyrant's face, as to command my admiration and respect, and to heighten a feeling of sorrow for her fate, which a lapse of years has not effaced. The king appeared to claim her on the ground of her mother having been his subject, and on the death of her father he considered the only bar to his pretensions removed. But she was born in the fort, under the British flag, and had, therefore, an undoubted right to be free.

Our settlement at Fort William has

for some time past been abandoned by the African Company, the last governor there having been detained as a prisoner for three years, although the king has often since that period made overtures for a renewal of communication.

Dahomy, about half a century ago, one of the most powerful and flourishing of the African nations, and the richest from its commerce with Europeans, is now much fallen; not only from the loss of its trade, but it has also been extremely humbled by unsuccessful wars with the Eyoes and Ashantees.

The slave trade ought never to have existed, and therefore there can be no question as to the propriety of its abolition. But it is only from its *complete* extinction that we can expect to promote the

real welfare and happiness of the African people. When deprived of the source which even the partial existence of this traffic affords for obtaining those numerous articles of European manufacture, which they have long been accustomed to consider not merely as luxuries, but as necessaries, they must then endeavour to acquire them by other and more laudable means.

That the Africans engaged in wars before the slave trade commenced, and will continue to do so, when it has entirely ceased, is but too probable; yet certainly not to the extent which that commerce undoubtedly occasioned.

In a long harangue which Adahoonza made on this subject to Mr. Abson, he declared, in the name of his ancestors

and himself, that they never made war for the *mere* purpose of obtaining slaves to purchase the merchandise of white men, and adduced many plausible reasons for carrying on hostilities, independent of such a view. But with all due deference to the memory of this august personage, although his progenitors or himself may not have attacked their neighbours for this *mere* purpose, yet it is impossible not to suspect (were we not otherwise assured of the fact,) that the desire of acquiring European manufactures, must have had a very material effect in exciting them to pick unnecessary quarrels. But, when this excitement no longer exists, and legitimate commerce is consequently extended and increased, we may look with confidence to the pro-

gressive civilization and prosperity of Nigritia.

As this, however, cannot be the work of a day, it would in the meantime be an attempt worthy of Britain, to reclaim these people from the shocking practice of immolating human victims, the next grand barrier to their improvement.

The Dahomians, and the surrounding nations, are, like all savages, under the thraldom of superstition; but they are by no means so extremely bigoted as many others in the world.

They evidently possess, in the common affairs of life, a degree of shrewdness, reasonableness, and sound sense, far beyond the natives inhabiting the barbarous portions either of Asia or America, and entertain a very exalted opinion of the

superior understanding and intellectual powers of Europeans.

It is on this last ground, more especially, that I would venture humbly to suggest an interference with the King of Dahomy on the subject of the sacrifices, not in any way dictatorial, or meddling with his government in other respects, but in the style of friendly recommendation from the highest authority in this country; and additional weight might, perhaps, be given, by other powers uniting in this solicitation.

Two of his sons might also be brought to England for a year or two, where every pains should be taken to inculcate those sentiments most likely to promote the end in view, or which might prove otherwise beneficial to their country.

Difficulty-makers * would, probably, oppose to these schemes the very circumstances already detailed, of the performance of the sacrifices being considered a religious duty, and of the king's refusing to give up a single victim of the established number even when allured by the highest prices for slaves; and they might also advert to the rapidity with which his two brothers recurred to their native habits on landing in Dahomy.

To the first objection it may be replied, that they have never yet been solemnly reasoned with on the impropriety of these practices; and I think it more than probable, from their notion of the judgment

* A difficulty-maker is an abominable nuisance, and totally unfit for any service, either by sea or land.

and attainments of white men, that they might concede, more particularly to such a recommendation as that proposed, what no mercenary motive would ever induce them to yield to. With respect to the king's brothers, in the instance alluded to, it cannot be said, in fact, that they knew any thing about England, or the purpose for which they were sent there.

We have now an accredited agent at the capital of Ashantee, who might, but with all due delicacy, easily sound them on the subject in that quarter; and from the King's ship, which usually runs down this coast to inspect the settlements, (and which could anchor for a week at Whydah,) a deputation of *discreet* officers, previously well instructed in the object of their mission, might proceed with

proper ceremony to Abomey, where, if they even failed in obtaining, a compliance with their suggestions, they would at least be listened to with respect and attention. Should they on the other hand prove successful, the example of two such nations as Dahomy and Ashantee, would undoubtedly have a powerful influence in reclaiming the neighbouring states.

It is a practice on some parts of the Gold Coast, at the funeral of a man of consequence, to bury alive, in the same grave with the corpse, some young female; and, I believe, I am not incorrect in stating, that Mr. Dawson, when Governor of Animaboo, on observing from the fort, preparations for a sacrifice of this kind, rushed out with a number of followers, stopped the proceedings, saved

the intended victim from a most frightful death, and, by his address and authority, prevented a repetition of this practice ever afterwards in that vicinity.

Such a strong measure as this could not have been resorted to among the natives of Hindostan; yet, even there, where prejudice and superstition reign with far more absolute sway than in Africa, the British influence, judiciously directed, has, in some districts, nearly abolished the dreadful custom of burning widows on the funeral piles of their husbands.

That experiment, therefore, in favour of the Africans, and in the cause of humanity, is surely worth making, which can be made with so little difficulty, trouble, or expense.—But I must now return to my narrative.

I had been recommended by the captain to get, if possible, to Little Popoe, an adjoining country, and there to wait an opportunity of being picked up.

Along that line of coast from Cape Saint Paul's to Cape Formosa, (an extent of, at least, three hundred miles,) an easy communication between the various countries is afforded by means of lakes and rivers, which run in a direction nearly parallel with the sea-beach. My course to Little Popoe lay through one of these, and finding myself unfettered, I lost no time in engaging with the people of a canoe belonging to that country, who having come to Whydah on some business were about to return.

Taking leave of my friends, I embarked, with my remaining goods and

chattels, in this canoe, about sunset one evening, and paddling swiftly along the lake, bid adieu to this land of despotism with a light heart*.

We made the best of our way all night, and the next day brought us to a place called Grand Popoe. Here the canoe-men, in defiance of all my remonstrances, turned aside from the main channel of the lake, and proceeded for a considerable distance through a winding avenue of mangrove-trees, which grew in the water,

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* I must confess that I have since observed a different kind of tyranny, which, though happily not permanent, is yet, whilst it lasts, more disgusting and intolerable than even the despotism of Dahomy. I mean the tyranny of demagogues and the mob, in those countries where real freedom is abused, and the rabble cry of 'Liberty' made the watch-word for every species of brutality and excess.

and opened at last on the village where the chief caboceer, (or king, as he is sometimes called,) of this place resides.

It appeared to be the duty of these canoemen to bring all their passengers to this personage, who levies a toll upon each for the liberty of passing his territory, and, as his High Mightiness happened to be drunk, (the first African dignitary whom I had observed in this state,) I was a good deal annoyed by the difficulties he started in selecting his *dash* or present. In this perplexity, however, I fortunately met with a female friend to whom I had once occasion to offer some little civility, and who now evidently interested herself in my favour. This was one of his women who seemed to possess considerable influence with

him, and who, having been some months previous to this time at Whydah, either on business or pleasure, visited, among other places, Fort William, (as a *foreigner of distinction*,) where I made her a present of a small white silk handkerchief. Soon after my landing she disappeared from among the crowd by which I was surrounded, and in a few minutes returned, displaying this handkerchief round her arm, as if to tell me she had not forgotten the attention.

The king, at last, chose from among the articles I had with me, two pieces of cloth and a keg of brandy, and I was allowed, after a delay of several hours, to proceed on my voyage.

They entertained me during my stay with some dancing, music, and singing, in

a style truly savage. Whilst these performances were going on, I observed several men with their hands tied behind them, and their ancles bound, lying under some trees at a little distance, but whether they were prisoners of war or criminals I was unable to ascertain.

This night, and the whole of the next day, I pursued my course towards Little Popoe, which lies a considerable distance farther to the westward. On the north bank of this lake, I observed the wild elephants were very numerous.

I arrived at my destination, the house of a Dutch *Sambo**, of the name of Neiser, on the evening of the third day,

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* A person of colour, having three parts black, and one of white blood in his composition.

my face and hands completely flayed, from exposure to the sun in the canoe.

Little Popoe, being a frontier town of Creppee, is protected by the king of Ashantee. Its municipal laws are mild and equally favourable to the subjects of all countries; hence it enjoys a considerable share of trade, although the bar is bad.

The language and habits of the natives bear a near resemblance to those of Whydah. They are an industrious, obliging and well-mannered people, very cheerful, and fond of public sports, such as running, wrestling, leaping, and other feats of activity.

After remaining about three weeks at this place the Princess Amelia arrived in the road, and I immediately embarked, rejoiced to find myself once more afloat.

I met on board of her one of the lieutenants of the captured French ship, the rest of her ship's company having been disposed of in different directions. He very quickly introduced himself to me, and I found him a most intelligent companion, full of humour and vivacity. He had the rank of lieutenant in the French navy and had served during the late war, until taken prisoner by *Messieurs les Anglais*, after which he resided for a considerable time either on board a ship on Portchester lake, or somewhere ashore in that neighbourhood; a portion of his life of which he always spoke with extreme horror. Being well read, and having seen a good deal of the world, his mind was much improved, and he was withal exceedingly communicative, especially as

he could express himself in English with great fluency, On one subject, indeed, he greatly resembled (as our captain said,) a pair of bellows, and used to puff and blow, with uncommon volubility; namely, the capture of his ship. Our attack upon her when quietly employed trading in a neutral port, he deemed one of the most barefaced and infamous acts of piracy ever committed in ancient or modern times, and, in support of his opinion, quoted various authorities (I believe Vattel and Puffendorf,) respecting the laws of nations, and the rights of belligerents.

I, on the other hand, defended the measure, as perfectly correct, and insisted, that whatever Vattel, Puffendorf, or himself might say about the laws of

nations, there was a law of nature greatly paramount to all, which bound every Briton to attack a Frenchman on the first symptom of war. Moreover, we were right even on the ground of that Buonapartean axiom which says "whatever policy requires, justice sanctions," and it was clearly sound policy to secure an enemy sufficiently strong to have captured all the English vessels at Lagos, had he only been aware of the war; well knowing also, as we did, what free and easy gentry Frenchmen were, when they had power in their hands. "Ah sacre!" exclaimed my antagonist, in an ecstasy of rage, "how dare you speak of Frenchmen, and free and easy?—look at your own conduct, you robber—look at La Julie!—Ah Mon Dieu, the free and

easy!—*f*—— *les voleurs!*—Your royal tigers (meaning men-of-war,) not only plunder and insult the world, but its commerce must also be annoyed by the rapacity of your dirty merchantmen."

Such was the general character of our conversation, (on this particular subject,) and he often, at such times would express his ardent desire, that the civilized powers of Europe might unite their naval forces to put down the haughty tyrants of the sea.

I generally then attempted, (what would appear in his frame of mind, an impossibility,) to convince him that no other mistress of the ocean would wield her power with such moderation as Britain; and I contended that she used it only to support weaker nations against

against the unprincipled aggressions and usurpation of France by land, and to maintain that just balance so necessary to the prosperity of every commercial country—adding, that England, far from being tyrannical, was so squeamishly honest as to permit the trade of her enemies to be openly carried on under neutral flags.

This view of the subject naturally called forth, on his part, a torrent of invective against our domineering system; and when he became provoking beyond reasonable endurance, I generally wound up the argument by singing him a verse or two of "Rule Britannia," which he called an insult, and frequently swore he would revenge with his sword. Not understanding the hop, skip, and jump nonsense of the small sword, I protested

against this mode of warfare, but hinted that with a ship-pistol, tomahawk, or any clumsy weapon, I should be ready to back my opinions the first day we landed.

All these dire notions of war and vengeance generally evaporated however towards morning, (as often happens with many other valiant people,) and we usually became friends again. Indeed it was absolutely necessary for the Frenchman to be on *speaking* terms with me, in order to ensure an opponent for an argument, an object which, in our small party, might not have been otherwise so easily attainable.

The discussion on the subject of his ship commenced on the coast of Africa, continued across the whole Atlantic

Ocean, and was by no means in a finished state when we reached the West Indies.

Arrived at last, however, at the island of Barbadoes, we were boarded as usual on entering Carlisle Bay by the guard boat of one of the men-of-war, (the Serapis, an old-fashioned four-and-forty,) when we received intelligence which rather gave a favourable colour to that side of the question which my friend espoused.

The officer of the guard, on hearing from whence we came, and the name of the ship, said, that for some time past a sharp look-out had been kept for us, there being an order from the Admiralty-court to seize us in the King's name for robbery and piracy on the high seas! At the same time he placed the King's broad arrow on the main-mast, and we

were, in all due form, seized and secured accordingly.

He then went on to explain, that on the arrival of La Julie in the West Indies, she had been boarded and examined by the ship to which he belonged; when finding she had been captured by vessels having no letter of marque, or legal right whatever for engaging in hostilities, our act of course came under the head of piracy, and the vessel taken consequently became a prize to the first man-of-war that fell in with her, and as such she had been duly condemned to the Serapis.

The Frenchman who listened to all this with eager attention might naturally be allowed to display a little extravagant joy, at the triumph of his opinion. "Ah hah!" said he, "you will dash and keep

your katreen * with your prize-money ?—yes, you will dash !—you will now cut a figure !—you will every one be hanged ; and it will give me very much pleasure to attend the ceremony :—*Comment vous portez vous, mon ami ?*

Duncan, (the name of the lieutenant of the Serapis, if I remember rightly,) who seemed rather a dry fellow, hoped that nothing serious would result to us from the commission of a very dashing, though irregular, act ; yet, as La Julie must have become a prize to some authorized ship, it was quite as well she should have fallen to their lot as any other ; but it was indispensably necessary to prove us to be pirates, in order to establish their own claim to her.

* The West Indian term for a gig.

As a proof, however, that he did not consider us the worst people in the world, he remained to spend the afternoon in our society; and notwithstanding our *impending* fate, we managed to jollify a little, and make a day of it.

In the evening my Gallic friend came up to me on deck with much appearance of attachment, and said, that although he had often argued with asperity about our want of law, in the affair of his capture, yet seeing the serious aspect the matter had now assumed, he should, *sans badinage*, feel much regret if this business involved in distress those for whom, in all other respects, he entertained a high esteem and regard.

This argument was too generous and subduing to admit of contradiction, and

I shook the good fellow heartily by the hand, although he was a Frenchman.

Whether from the captain of the Princess Amelia (Bogle) having died on the middle passage, by whose orders Mr. Layton, (then in charge of the ship,) and those under him were supposed to have acted, without judging of their propriety; or whether the form of seizure, in order to transfer the prize, was deemed a sufficient satisfaction to the law in our case, I cannot say, but in two or three days we were liberated, still however looking rather sheepish, neither relishing the loss of the prize on which we had calculated so much, nor the bad name we had acquired.

We proceeded with a large convoy, under charge of the Fairy sloop of war, Lord William Fitzroy, onwards to Ja-

maica, and on the 1st of January, 1804, arrived at Port Royal.

Here my leave of absence being expired, I rejoined the King's service, and was appointed by Sir John Duckworth, the commander-in-chief, to be surgeon of the Flying Fish schooner, commanded by Lieutenant Price, an old messmate of mine, who was a cruizer of the keenest class; and, for the next year, we roamed together through each creek and corner of the Caribbean sea, and plundered every enemy of England, without the risk of incurring the penalties of piracy.

It may, perhaps, be a pardonable digression here to notice how this officer, on one occasion, made a considerable sum of prize-money in a very miraculous sort of manner.

Whilst cruizing off Cape Tiburoon, in the Island of St. Domingo, in the Sparrow cutter, commanded by Lieutenant Wylie, they chased and came up with, an American brig, whose cargo, added to other circumstances, created such suspicion of her being enemy's property, that they thought proper to send her in to Port Royal for examination.

The American captain, however, swore so positively, through thick and thin, to the truth of the papers which he produced, that the Admiralty-court was induced to set him at liberty, when he instantly commenced a prosecution for demurrage against Lieutenant Wylie for having detained him.

In this state of the affair, the present Lieutenant Fitton of the navy, (then a

midshipman commanding a small tender,) arrived in Port Royal, and went on board the Sparrow to visit Wylie, whom he found exceedingly low-spirited at the idea of the ruinous damages which would be awarded against him, on account of the *Yankee.*

Fitton, on hearing the name of the captain and brig, and the nature of the cargo, desired his friend to be under no apprehension, for she was yet a good prize.

He then explained, that cruizing in his tender, near the spot where the Sparrow had chased the vessel in question, and much about the same time, they had caught a large shark, and were surprised on hearing the man employed in cutting it open, sing out, " Stand by to receive your

letters, my boys, for here's the post-man come on-board," handing out at the same moment a bundle of papers from its maw. These were but little injured by the digestive powers of the animal, and Fitton retained them.

They now appeared to be the *real* papers of the American, which he had thrown overboard when pressed in the chase, and which had been swallowed by this shark. They proved, beyond a doubt, that the cargo was French.

The two gentlemen proceeded instantly up to Kingston with this new and decisive evidence, but all further investigation was rendered unnecessary, for the captain of the brig was so thunderstruck on hearing the circumstance, (naturally considering it as a visitation from Heaven for his

perjuries,) that he immediately absconded, and the vessel, after all, was condemned to the Sparrow, giving Wylie three thousand, and my friend *, fifteen hundred pounds, for their respective shares.

Mr. Fitton sent up the jaw-bones of this shark to the Admiralty-court at Jamaica (where they now remain,) with his compliments, observing that he considered them a very proper collar for all neutrals to swear through in future.

But this tell-tale shark had not yet done with the poor Americans, who never

* Poor Price was at last, in *our* schooner, most probably, blown up at sea, with all hands; for no vestige or wreck of them was ever discovered on any shore. I was not of this party, having been previously appointed to a frigate.

lost any opportunity of turning an honest penny, by carrying on the trade of our enemies.

Captain Otway *, was at that period serving in the West Indies, in the Trent frigate, and happened to be present at the discussion of this affair of the shark. Being about to sail on a cruize, Mr. Waterhouse, the prize agent, desired him, if he met with a certain American brig, (which he described,) and could find out the captain's name to be Pearl Darkey, a name he was not likely to forget, to send him in, for, by the same papers, it appeared that he was deeply concerned in these transactions.

The Trent sailed, and, among others,

* Now Rear-admiral Otway, and Commander-in-chief on the Leith station.

fell in with a brig of a description similar to that which Mr. Waterhouse had given; and the moment the master of her stepped on the quarter-deck of the frigate, with his papers in his hand, Captain Otway, at a venture addressed him, "Mr. Pearl Darkey, how do you do—I am glad to see you,—the very man I have been looking for." Jonathan started and turned pale, on hearing his real name thus familiarly mentioned, (for it was actually Darkey himself,) and Captain Otway, added, by way of helping him out of his dilemma, "I am in possession of your whole history and connexion,—I know every thing about you, and am now going to send you into Port Royal for judgment." The man, in his dismay and confusion, naturally concluded that their

schemes had been betrayed by some who were in the secret, and did not even attempt to defend himself under his fictitious character. The *ruse* of confidently addressing him at once as Pearl Darkey, threw him off his guard, and deprived him of every subterfuge. She was accordingly sent in and condemned a good prize to the Trent, after the fullest proof of her being loaded with the property of the enemy. In the whole of these transactions this Anti-American shark was a solitary, but very convincing evidence.

There yet remains one circumstance deserving of remark, respecting our own history,—Fourteen years after these events (1819) I happened to call at the office of Mr. R. Taylor, one of the merchants to whom I had been attached,

in order to get some dates from the log book of the ship for the purpose of writing these notes, when, on declaring my name, the gentleman in the office, equally to my surprise and satisfaction, informed me that our capture of La Julie stood perfectly good after all, and that they had a sum of prize-money in their hands for me, on her account.

It appeared that the owners, after the commencement of hostilities, anticipating that the ship would make some attempt upon the enemy, had actually taken out letters of marque and reprisal for her, which upon the affair at Barbadoes transpiring at home, were examined and found to have been dated in London a few days anterior to our business on the coast of Africa, consequently, legalizing our cap-

ture; and therefore the original decree had been reversed, and that proportion of the prize which of right belonged to us was restored, but still allowing, by some arrangement, a share to the Serapis.

I pocketed the money and marched off, not a little gratified by this very unexpected windfall; but my gratification would have been much increased on the occasion, had my good friend the Frenchman been present, that I might have shewn him I had got the right side of the argument at last.

This history, (although a very short one,) tends to prove that all judges and other potentates ought to be exceedingly cautious about hanging people, unless they have the fullest evidence of their deserving

it; as in our case, for example, it would have been mortifying in the extreme to have suffered the law at Barbadoes, for that very act which entitled us to prize-money in England. It should also be a lesson to those sage personages who have the management of prizes not to be in too great a hurry in alienating them from the right owners—the captors, to wit—nor so freely to stigmatize as buccaneers and freebooters, those who direct their warlike operations only against the declared enemies of their country.

FINIS.

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